

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2026

News from our team

Miral is leaving – Miral is coming. Our long-time occupational therapist, Miral Handal, is marrying a young man from Jerusalem and will be moving there. Miral Andonia applied for a position as a therapist and will begin working in one of the school's support groups. Our long-time speech therapist, Jihan, has returned from the U.S. and will once again be assisting us in the speech therapy department four days a week.

For several months, the LIFEGATE team leaders have been working on a restructuring of the therapy department. Under the concept of "intensive therapy," children and young people receive daily therapy in three-month intervals; after this period, the child moves on to the next phase of therapy. We expect this focused approach within a specific timeframe to lead to better and faster progress for both our younger and older patients. We are delighted that our team is implementing these new therapeutic steps with openness and motivation.

Reflections

by Burghard Schunkert

"Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ—truly I tell you, that person will not lose their reward." Mark 9:41

In the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, we find many very serious statements. Following Jesus is no "walk in the park"; the calls to turn away from sin and wrongdoing are radical. But living among people who do not know Jesus is also mentioned here. Christians are called to serve others. Most of us do this without expecting a direct reward. It is love for one's neighbor put into practice. Others think that without them, God could accomplish nothing—that God should be grateful they chose Him, gave up so much, and actually deserve a reward for it. Deserve heaven? It does us all good when someone recognizes our efforts, our dedication, and sometimes even our sacrifices. Some say that doesn't matter—our reward is in heaven. True, but we don't have to earn it; it has already been given to us (by grace alone, apart from our works). We are free to shape our lives, our activities, and our care for others based on our personal relationship with Jesus, and we are under no compulsion. Jesus is not only our role model; when He lives in us, He is also the one who shapes and acts in every relationship and task we undertake. We do not work for Him; He works with and through us. That is a huge difference—a liberation: I don't have to do it alone; God accomplishes it despite my weakness (and, if He wills, even without me).

A cool glass of water in a hot country is a refreshing treat that many of us were able to enjoy this summer. When the Muslim parents of our students expressed

their heartfelt thanks to our Christian team with tears in their eyes at the end-of-year ceremonies before summer break—for the loving support and care their children received at LIFEGATE—it was like that refreshing "glass of water" that did us all a world of good! Jesus heard and saw this; He will bestow the reward. We are privileged to offer the "cup" of fresh water, but we also want to receive it. May our lives be an invitation for people to get to know Jesus and ask about Him. We believe that He will answer, because He loves all people and came for their salvation. Life with Him is exciting, challenging, and sometimes exhausting, but it is rich, fulfilling, and overflowing—and simply the life that leads into eternity.

Yours, Burghard Schunkert

LIFEGATE REHABILITATION

Beit Jala

P.O.B. 10369, Jerusalem

phone +972-(0)2 2741373

fax +972-(0)2 2741065

Email: reha@lgate.org

<https://www.lifegate-reha.org/en/>

account for donations:

account holder Lifegate-Rehabilitation

Mercantile Bank Jerusalem, Israel

branch 638, Swift code: BARDILIT

account no. 61-244988

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TOR ZUM LEBEN –

LIFEGATE REHABILITATION e.V. (TzL)

PO Box 101018

D-44010 Dortmund

phone: +49 (0)931-5 80 69

mobile: +49 (0)15792361991

Email: geschaeftsstelle@lifegate-reha.de

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Editorial managers: Richard Sharp & Volker Metz



Photo: LIFEGATE

Children from the LIFEGATE Early Intervention School enjoy their time in the newly opened sensory garden

Dear friends!

This year, the Jewish New Year falls on the second weekend of September, the Day of Atonement falls in mid-September, and the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated from Friday evening, September 25, through the holiday of Simchat Torah on October 4. Three years ago, on October 6, 2023—the penultimate day of that year's Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)—we returned happily to Beit Jala with our young people with disabilities from a recreational retreat with an Israeli group from the Sea of Galilee. But then we woke up the next morning to the sound of air raid sirens. Since then, we and the people of the country have been in a state of emergency. The wounds have not yet healed, and mistrust between Arabs and Jews remains very deep. On the Jewish side in particular, radicalization has taken place in many areas, constantly fueled by the extreme parties in the Israeli government. In this context, militant teenagers and young adults from the Israeli-Jewish settler movement in the West Bank carry out attacks on the Palestinian population in their villages, fields, pastures, and olive groves. Often, the Israeli police or military arrive at the scenes of the attacks too late to prevent the destruction and, in some cases, deadly assaults. Many Palestinian Christians—as well as Israelis—no longer want to live in the country under these conditions and are seeking alternatives around the world.

Together with us, many Palestinians and Israelis now hope that, following the elections in Israel this October

moderate politicians will be able to form a new government, thereby strengthening those who seek to foster a life of respect, justice, dialogue, and exchange among all population groups in this country. There are still enough people here who, like us, sincerely wish for this and are committed to making it happen. We on the LIFEGATE team are grateful for the many opportunities to convey this very message daily—in both word and deed—through our programs. After three years of being denied permission to hold our Palestinian-Israeli encounter retreat in Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee, we received a joyful surprise in early September: We are allowed to travel to Tabgha again this year, where we will meet Israelis with disabilities from Kfar Tikva ("Village of Hope") and spend the days of the Feast of Tabernacles with them. At a preparatory meeting in northern Israel, the teams from Kfar Tikva and LIFEGATE planned the joint retreat.

We very much hope that the hostilities between the different population groups will be resolved and that the security situation will improve here as well. It would be so important for the many unemployed people in our region if visitors would come here again and hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies could resume operations. Here at LIFEGATE, we are also looking forward to future encounters with visitors. We will continue to do everything we can to make our small contribution to peace in this country.

Please support us with your positive thoughts and prayers.

Part of the newsletter was translated from German into English using the DeepL Translator (DeepL SE, Cologne, Germany).

Environmental Protection Projects with LIFEGATE

Always on the lookout for meaningful “niches” where we can engage with people who have cognitive and physical disabilities, environmental projects are at the top of our list of priorities. For years, we’ve been building greenhouses out of recycled materials (old wooden pallets and plastic bottles), enabling low-income families to grow vegetables and flowers for their own use and for sale. Our “plastic greenhouses” have been continuously improved over the years and the idea has even been shared with Asia. Even people in wheelchairs can operate such a greenhouse—we’re delighted about that. At LIFEGATE, we collect organic waste and turn it into compost, which we use as fertilizer on our own fields and may even sell in the future.

We are currently discussing new projects to collect used batteries and electronic waste with an Italian organization that has become active on environmental issues in Bethlehem. Within LIFEGATE, the team—and then the children—learn how to sort waste properly. A lack of awareness and a shortage of landfills in the Palestinian territories often result in all kinds of waste being dumped and burned somewhere outside a village or city. People living nearby are exposed to toxic gases, and the cancer rate is high in the vicinity of these “garbage dumps.” There’s a lot to do here. — We’re partnering with other organizations that are tackling these issues.

Playing, Smelling, Feeling, and Experiencing Community in a Little Piece of Nature

It was with great joy that we inaugurated the “Play and Sensory Garden” project on our neighboring property and are now able to use it every day. We’ve laid out natural grass and planting beds among the old olive trees. In our “Scent Tent,” we’ve planted herbs and other fragrant plants; a barefoot path offers a special experience for the feet; the sandbox is perfect for building; and cozy benches and seating areas invite you to linger. Under a covered pavilion, we can gather, put on plays, or celebrate a party. Here, too, we’ve repurposed many discarded wooden pallets to build a play hill with slides, a tunnel, a wheelchair swing, and a wheelchair carousel. We still need to add shade to some of the stations, which we hope to build this fall with our upcoming volunteers. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who helped!



Another greenhouse is being built at LIFEGATE from old wooden pallets

Our New Calendars and Olive Oil

The new LIFEGATE calendar once again offers a colorful and interesting glimpse into LIFEGATE’s work. The calendars will go to press in September and will be available shortly thereafter.

The olive harvest is beginning in the coming weeks. In the mountains of Samaria, farmers pick the olives by hand during the day to ensure that no animals are harmed during the harvest and that the olive trees are protected. The harvested olives are then transported from there to an olive oil press in Taybeh. The LIFEGATE team is present during the bottling process and subsequently labels the bottles and canisters and packs the containers for transport to Europe. We do our best to ensure that this high-quality and flavorful olive oil arrives safely in Tauberbischofsheim, Germany.



Luise and Erik Praetorius with Samuel and Jonah

A Wonderful Extension

Erik Praetorius, our German staff member seconded to LIFEGATE by the German organization *Coworkers*, remained in the country with his family despite all the dangers and adversities of the past three years and continued to work at LIFEGATE. We are very grateful to them for this. During this time, Erik worked intensively at the LIFEGATE early intervention center, trained staff and parents, and was actively involved in many areas of our facility.

To our great delight, Erik and his family have extended their stay for another three years, and he will now also be working in the special education sector. This is a true blessing bestowed upon our work by Erik, his family, and the *Coworkers* organization. Thank you very much!

Passing on the Gift

The partnership with Joni Erikson Tada and her organization, *Joni and Friends*, gives LIFEGATE and me personally the opportunity to share the experience and blessings we have been given over many years with people from other countries. In August, I was invited to the opening of a center (*Joni’s House*) in Opovo, Serbia, where I met dedicated Christians who pour their hearts into caring for children and adults with disabilities and who, with the help of *Joni and Friends*, were able to establish this center. The center will now offer daily therapy and rehabilitation services, parent counseling, and psychological support; it will feature a small café for relaxation; and, above all, it will be staffed by loving, open-hearted people who are dedicated to addressing the needs of those they serve. In addition to networking and many conversations, I was able to attend a family retreat and share in the joy of these families as they spent a happy and blessed time with their children with disabilities. We at LIFEGATE will gladly continue to support this work as needed. I returned from Serbia feeling grateful and fulfilled.

“Stagnation—not at LIFEGATE”

“Stagnation is regression,” someone once told me. So we keep moving forward, renewing, expanding, and creating something new. We want to welcome more people and reach them with our rehabilitation programs. We’re currently building the space for this in the upper part of the LIFEGATE building: on the one hand, a floor to expand existing workspaces; on the other, two floors for people we want to invite to spend time with us, learn with us, and get to know our country—especially for people who use wheelchairs or have other disabilities. We call these floors “LIFEGATE Lighthouse,” because we want them to radiate guidance, light, and hope—not only into our country but also into the entire world. They are meant to serve people through simple beauty, the programs offered, but above all through the encounters and positive experiences people share with one another—especially here, in an environment marked by conflicts, disputes, and wars. Light is needed in the darkness; guidance where the course and direction have been lost; hope where suffering, mistrust, and hatred have gained the upper hand; and love where the strength to reach out to one another has been lost among many people. It was here that the story of our God through Jesus found its fulfillment, and salvation and redemption were granted to humanity. What do we need to make this happen? Prayer, faith, protection, helping hands, and a few shekels, euros, and dollars. Someone gathers it all together and takes it out. We believe and know this! We are (merely) faithful stewards.

Your help counts ...!

Thanks to your help we were able to ...

... successfully continue our daily support work in early intervention, school, and the department for children with severe and multiple disabilities (€90,000);
... support medical care at LIFEGATE, including doctor’s visits, therapies, and assistive devices (€30,000 over two months);
... manufacture and purchase training equipment for the new intensive therapy program (€10,000).

With your help, we’d like to...

... purchase a new freezer for the bakery (€3,000);
... launch the new environmental projects (€10,000);
... fund our ongoing support work (€80,000).

Thank you very much for your support!

These concerns make up a certain part of our monthly costs, which are in total about 90,000.- €. They are the most urgent of our concerns and we’d be especially grateful for your support.